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ONE RIVER **MANY VOICES**

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In 2000, a section of the lower Willamette River—10 to 12 miles, from the Broadway Bridge in Portland out to Sauvie Island—was given federal Superfund status. Superfund is shorthand for the 1980 Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act.

One River, Many Voices untangles the river's story and the Superfund process. Across 14 podcasts, host Jack McGowan explores the sources of the Willamette's pollution, the impact of history, and the promise of the future. We hear from a wide variety of sources, and we see the river through the eyes of those who live near it, recreate on and around it, and work in river-dependent businesses.

This place was pristine when European settlers found it and settlement began in the 1800s. Oregon became a state in 1859, and it was in those next few decades that a pattern emerged.

“By and large, the mentality of people during those decades was that nature was there to be used, various resources were there to be extracted and used and sold,” James Hillegas-Elting, author of the forthcoming book, “Speaking for the River: Confronting Pollution In Oregon’s Willamette Valley” tells McGowan.

Growth is a hard thing to slow. By the 1940s, were you to drop fish into the Willamette around Portland, they’d die almost instantly from a lack of oxygen.

Much of today’s pollution—toxic chemicals burrowed in the riverbed and refusing to break down—is decades old. The solutions, the costs, and who picks up the tab – it’s complicated.

The river’s already much healthier than it was a few decades ago. Portland’s Big Pipe project now keeps sewer overflow events to a minimum. Consciousness helps, too. But 14 years into the Superfund process, it’s just beginning, and it will take the range of concerned parties to do the job, and make the river a better place for future generations.